

Early Funding for Mitigation Site Selection at NW Region WSDOT

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What is the Goal of Early Funding for Mitigation Site Selection?

Our goal is to reduce project costs and improve project delivery by developing a process and funding source that allows mitigation site selection prior to the project design phase.

What Are the Limitations of the Current Mitigation Site Selection Process?

- **Late Site Selection Limits Site Quality and Options** – Currently, funding for mitigation site selection occurs during the project design phase, typically lasting about two years. The Project Engineer must identify, select, and purchase a mitigation site and still provide time for mitigation site design and permitting. This can result in site selection based on availability rather than desirability.
- **Project-Specific Sites Limit Efficiencies and Benefits** – Mitigation sites are usually identified on an individual project basis. This limits the size of the sites, their environmental benefits, and the cost efficiencies available from consolidated mitigation. The way mitigation is currently handled for individual projects seldom allows consolidating mitigation for multiple projects.

What are the Advantages of Early Mitigation Site Selection?

An early site selection process prior to or during scoping would provide WSDOT a number of substantial economic, environmental, and political advantages:

- **Lowens Risk, Increases Success** – A WSDOT ID team (Inter-disciplinary team composed of a biologist, permit coordinator and a landscape architect) can identify and select sites with the highest potential for success and thereby reduce risks.
- **Reduces Overall Costs (Bigger Bang for the Buck)** – Decreases overall mitigation costs by streamlining the process and leveraging efficiencies and economies of scale in two key ways – consolidating mitigation for multiple projects at one site and selecting better mitigation sites. Early investment optimizes long-term benefits for multiple projects.
 - **Lost Opportunity** – Good sites that are available during project scoping may be gone by the time project design and permitting occur.
 - **Acquisition Cost** – Costs to acquire sites during project scoping should be lower than during the project design phase. Early acquisition may also reduce the chance of speculators artificially driving up land costs or acquiring the best mitigation sites.
 - **Design Cost** – Cost to design one consolidated site should be less than for multiple sites.
 - **Construction Cost** – Larger mitigation projects draw more contractor interest and competitive bids than smaller mitigation projects.
 - **Monitoring Cost** – Monitoring a single site is more efficient than monitoring multiple sites.
 - **Site Management Cost** – Increased success would reduce costs for short- and long-term site-management and remediation.
 - **Replacement Costs** – Increased success would reduce the costs of replacing failed mitigation sites.

- **Favors Strategic Partnering** – Promotes opportunities for WSDOT to partner with other agencies and stakeholders such as federal, state, county, and city agencies; tribes; non-for-profit organizations and watershed groups; and private for-profit organizations. Partnering can reduce costs and improve our image with regulators.
- **Increases Environmental Benefits** – Larger sites connected to existing habitat tend to support higher environmental benefits.
- **Improves Reliable Project Delivery** – May remove site selection, mitigation and design from the critical path to win approval for project construction.

What Are Key Considerations to Identify and Prioritize Areas for Advance Mitigation?

- **Areas with Multiple Projects Planned for the Near Future** – Identify general areas (e.g., watersheds) where transportation projects are planned with major impacts to wetlands requiring significant mitigation. Focus advance mitigation efforts in these areas while balancing the amount of mitigation with the project needs.
- **Opportunities for Local Partnerships** – Focus advance mitigation efforts where opportunities exist to partner with local agencies and stakeholders. These groups can help identify and support efforts to acquire and restore priority sites.
- **Site Selection Responsibility** – ID team would identify and prioritize suitable sites within a project area or watershed.

What Funding is Available for Early Mitigation Site Selection?

Currently, funding for mitigation site selection occurs during the project design phase, which limits options for WSDOT. Alternative funding mechanisms to allow early funding for advance mitigation site selection include:

- **Project Dollars at or before Scoping Phase** – Project dollars could be made available to identify and acquire optimal mitigation sites prior to or during scoping phase.
- **Advance Environmental Mitigation Revolving Account** – Funding could be secured through WSDOT’s Advance Environmental Mitigation Revolving Account (AEMRA), which provides funding for site acquisition, design and development.

Who to Contact for More Information?

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